



# **The Church**

## **The Bride of Christ, the Body of Christ**

### **1 Corinthians 12:12-13**

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## THE CHURCH

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#### 1 Corinthians 12:12-13

One of the most beautiful moments in life is a wedding day. As a pastor, I have the best seat in the house. I get to see the bride and groom up close, looking into each other's eyes on the happiest day of their lives. And what makes the moment beautiful is not the dress or the flowers or the music. What makes the moment beautiful is the love that radiates between the bride and groom.

With great affection, the Bible refers to the church as the bride of Christ. There are 380,000 churches across America. Some are large, but most are small. Yet regardless of size, every church is the bride of Christ. That's how the Bible describes our relationship with Him. And at the culmination of human history, when Jesus returns, an angel will summon all of heaven together saying, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb" (Revelation 21:9, NAS). And all of heaven and earth will worship at the marriage feast of Christ and His church.<sup>1</sup> Jesus voluntarily extended His arms on the cross and sacrificed His life for us. That's how much He loves us. And because of His love, we are the bride of Christ.

The New Testament also refers to the church as the body of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul said, "Just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body" (1 Corinthians 12:12-13, ESV).

This morning, I want us to consider what that means. ***What does it mean to be the body of Christ? It's about believing, it's about belonging, and it's about becoming.***

### BELIEVING

Being a part of the body of Christ starts with ***believing***. To belong to a church, and to belong to God, a person must believe in Jesus Christ. Not just that He existed but declaring personal faith in Him as Savior and declaring personal commitment to follow Him as Lord.<sup>2</sup>

In 1 Corinthians 12:13, Paul said, "For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body." In this verse, "baptized" is not referring to water baptism. This verse is talking about being baptized in the Spirit, being born again, and becoming a child of God. And becoming a child of God is not through deeds, morality, or religion. It's through faith, believing that Jesus sacrificed His life on the cross, died in our place, paid the penalty for our sin, and rose from the dead proving to be the Son of God and proving that everything He said is true.

That's the Gospel and that's what a person must believe to become a Christian. The Bible says, "To all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12, NIV). The Bible says, "For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:26, NLT). The Bible also says, "If you confess with your mouth that

Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9, NAS).

And Acts 2 says, “All those who believed were together” (Acts 2:44, NAS). The church is a body of believers, a group of people who share the experience of God’s amazing grace.

Throughout my years as a pastor, I’ve conducted membership interviews with people interested in the church. And I love doing them. I love getting to know people, hearing their life story, and especially hearing their salvation story. But sometimes, a person does not have a clear understanding of the Gospel and does not have a true salvation story.

Some say they attended church with their grandmother. But that does not make a person a Christian. Some say they live a good life. But that does not make a person a Christian. So what does?

When we get to heaven, we may be surprised how little some people knew to become a Christian. God’s grace is like that. Like the thief on the cross beside Jesus, who wasted life as a criminal, who earned no merit to deserve heaven, who knew no theology, and was not baptized. Yet with his last breath, he simply said, “Lord, remember me.” To which Jesus said, “Today, you will be with Me in Paradise.” Again, God’s grace is like that.

To become a true Christian, to truly believe, requires two things.

One, an admission that you have sinned against God, that you have gone your own way, that you have violated His moral law, that you have offended His holiness, that you are guilty before Him, and that you desperately need help. You must admit you need a Savior. When a true Christian tells their story, there is humility in their voice, there is brokenness over their sin, and there is gratitude for grace. A true Christian sings “Amazing Grace” and means it. “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I’m found. Was blind, but now I see.”

A person must admit their sin and their need for a Savior. And two, a person must believe in Jesus. A person must believe that Jesus sacrificed His life on the cross, died in our place, paid the penalty for our sin, and supernaturally rose from the dead proving to be the Son of God and proving that everything He said is true.

Being a part of the body of Christ starts with ***believing***. To belong to a church, and to belong to God, a person must believe in Jesus Christ and declare their commitment to follow Him as Lord.

## BELONGING

Being a part of the body of Christ is also ***about belonging***.<sup>3</sup> It’s about belonging to something special and something significant. Through faith in Jesus, a person immediately becomes a member of the universal Church. But a person must also belong to a local church, to a physical group of friends and fellow believers to worship and grow and walk through life together.

Membership is not the best word to describe belonging to a church. Membership sounds like belonging to a club. But the church is not a club. The church is not a gym membership with people paying dues and showing up when they feel like it. The church is something far more special and significant.

First Corinthians 12:12 says, “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.”

The New Testament uses several metaphors to describe the church.

***Belonging to a church is like being a part of the human body.*** The body has arms and legs, eyes and ears, and each part is dependent on the other. And all the systems of the human body are connected and must work together. Romans 12:5 says, “In Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.” We are so connected that Paul said, “If one member suffers, all the members suffer” (1 Corinthians 12:26, NAS). If you stub your toe, your whole body reacts. Again, “if one member suffers, all the members suffer.” As the church, as the body of Christ, we belong to each other, we are dependent on each other, and we are connected to each other.

***Belonging to a church is like belonging to a kingdom.*** Our God and our Father is “the King of kings and Lord of lords” (1 Timothy 6:15, NAS). And because our Father is King, we belong to a kingdom. Paul said, “(God) rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son” (Colossians 1:13, NAS). Jesus said, “No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is ... born again” (John 3:5-7, NIV). We are “ambassadors for Christ,” representing our king in this world (2 Corinthians 5:20, NAS). As the church, as the kingdom of God, Jesus is our Lord. He is our King.

***Belonging to a church is like belonging to a family.*** John 1:12 says, “To those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God” (NIV). The moment you believed in Jesus, you became a child of God and a member of His family. Paul referred to “the household of God, which is the church of the living God” (1 Timothy 3:15, ESV).<sup>4</sup> John said, “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is who we are!” (1 John 3:1, NIV).<sup>5</sup> As the church, as the family of God, we are brothers and sisters, and we enjoy the security of knowing we are loved by our Father.

***Belonging to a church is like being in a marriage.*** Ephesians 5 uses marriage to illustrate the intimate relationship we have with Jesus. “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her” (Ephesians 5:25, NAS). The church is the bride of Christ. At the culmination of human history, when Jesus returns, an angel will summon all of heaven together, and declare, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb” (Revelation 21:9, NAS). That’s us! On that day, all of heaven and earth will worship at the marriage feast of Christ and His church.<sup>6</sup> As the church, as the bride of Christ, we enjoy an intimate relationship with Jesus and with each other.

***Belonging to a church is like being a temple.*** Not a temple of stone. Not a church building. But a spiritual temple. The Bible says, “You are a temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwells in you” (1 Corinthians 3:16, NAS). The New Testament refers to Jesus as the “cornerstone” of the

church.<sup>7</sup> He is the foundation of this spiritual temple. Peter writes, “You are living stones being built into a spiritual house” (1 Peter 2:5, NIV).<sup>8</sup> We are like bricks that make up the temple of God. As the church, as the temple of God, God dwells with us and in us.

***Belonging to a church is like being a part of a flock.*** Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep ... My sheep listen to My voice. I know them, and they follow Me” (John 10:11, 27, NIV). David said, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want” (Psalm 23:1, NAS). Isaiah said, “He tends His flock like a shepherd. He gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them close to His heart” (Isaiah 40:11, NIV). As the church, as His flock, we trust Jesus to protect us and provide for us.

- As the body of Christ, we are connected and dependent on each other.
- As the kingdom of God, we are citizens, and we submit to Him as our King and our Lord.
- As the family of God, we are brothers and sisters, and enjoy the security of knowing we are loved by Him.
- As the bride of Christ, we enjoy an intimate relationship with Jesus and with each other.
- As the temple of God, we enjoy God with us and God in us.
- As His flock, we trust Jesus to protect and provide for us.

You can worship God by yourself in a boat on a lake. But you can’t be the body by yourself. You can’t be a kingdom by yourself. You can’t be a family by yourself. You can’t be a marriage by yourself. You can’t be a temple by yourself. You can’t be a flock by yourself. As the body of Christ, we belong to something special and significant ... and we were meant to be together.

Together, we are to worship Him. Colossians 3 says we are to “sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts” (Colossians 3:16, NLT). Together, we are to share communion, remembering what Jesus did for us. “Do this in remembrance of Me,” He said (Luke 22:19, NAS). Together, we are to practice the “one another” passages of the New Testament. “Love one another<sup>9</sup> ... serve one another<sup>10</sup> ... be patient with one another<sup>11</sup> ... forgive one another<sup>12</sup> ... comfort one another<sup>13</sup> ... encourage one another ... pray for one another.”<sup>14</sup> Romans 12:15 covers the spectrum of human life when it says, “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and mourn with those who mourn.” Rejoice, mourn, and everything in between. Together!

The church, the body of Christ, is about ***belonging***. Belonging to something special and something significant. Belonging to God and belonging to each other.

## BECOMING

Being the body of Christ is about believing, belonging, and ***becoming***. It’s about becoming more like Jesus, growing in our faith, and living on mission. And to do that, we need each other.

Ephesians 4 describes the process of discipleship. Christ commissioned church leaders to “equip the saints for the work of service, to build up the body of Christ, so that we all attain to the unity of the faith, to the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-13).

Spiritual growth and spiritual maturity are a running theme throughout the New Testament. Paul said, “He has predestined us to become conformed to the image of His Son” (Romans 8:29). “We proclaim Him, admonishing every person and teaching every person with all wisdom, so that we may present every person complete in Christ” (Colossians 1:28). Paul said, “I labor for you ... until Christ is formed in you” (Galatians 4:19). And Paul said, “As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him” (Colossians 2:6).

To become more like Jesus, and to grow in our faith, we need each other.<sup>15</sup> You need others to encourage you when you need it, to comfort you when you need it, to challenge you when you need it. Solomon so wisely said, “Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another” (Proverbs 27:17, NAS).

This becoming also includes living on mission. Becoming, as the New Testament says, “fishers of men ... witnesses ... evangelists ... ambassadors for Christ.”<sup>16</sup> The church is founded on the Gospel. We are members of the church because of the Gospel. We are children of God through the Gospel. Therefore, we are to become “fishers of men ... witnesses ... evangelists ... and ambassadors for Christ.”<sup>17</sup> The church exists because of the Gospel, and the church exists for the Gospel.

You will never become all God wants you to be unless you belong. You will never become all God wants you to be unless you belong to a local body of believers.

## CONCLUSION

We love our church. We love our worship. Singing loudly and singing together. We love God’s word, learning more about Him and applying His truth to our lives. And we enjoy each other. This is a special church with a special spirit. And as we grow and make some changes, like going to two services, we want to maintain what is special about our church. And what’s most special is what joins us together in the first place.

- We believe Jesus sacrificed His life on the cross for us, dying in our place and paying the penalty for our sin.
- We believe Jesus supernaturally rose from the dead proving to be the Son of God and proving that everything He said is true.
- We trust Jesus as our Savior and we commit to Him as Lord.
- We believe the Bible is the word of God and we believe it is true.
- We desire to grow in our faith, to walk with Jesus, and to become more like Him.

- We commit to the “one another” commands of the New Testament, to love and encourage each other in Christ.
- We commit to the mission of the Gospel, praying God would use us to help others come to faith in Jesus as well.
- In all we do, we desire to walk in a manner worthy of His amazing grace.

***What does it mean to be the body of Christ? It's about believing, belonging, and becoming.*** We are the body of Christ. We are the bride of Christ. Jesus voluntarily extended His arms on the cross and sacrificed His life for us. That's how much He loved us. Because the church is precious to Jesus may it be precious to us.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> See Revelation 19:7-8.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., page 85. The standard for church membership should be no higher and no lower than personal, professed faith in Jesus Christ.

<sup>3</sup> There are several verses which point to the church as an organized body. The church is something to belong to. Jesus declared, “Peter, on this rock” – the rock was Peter’s faith and life – “I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18, ESV). Jesus is declaring that He was building something significant. Later on, Jesus instructed the disciples how to confront a stray disciple, He said, “If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector” (Matthew 18:17, ESV). This is a reference to church discipline. A stray disciple was first to be confronted one-on-one. If he did not listen, then two people were to confront him. If he still did not listen, Jesus said, “Tell it to the church.” The point is that the church is an organized group of believers to whom each member will be accountable. The book of Acts talks about King Herod persecuting “those who belonged to the church” (Acts 12:1). Culturally, there was a recognition of people belonging to the church. And throughout the New Testament, it refers to local churches. Paul addressed his letters to the church in Jerusalem, the church in Corinth, the church in Thessalonica, the church in Ephesus, and so on (See Acts 11:22, 1 Corinthians 1:2, 1 Thessalonians 1:1, Revelation 2:1).

<sup>4</sup> Paul also said, “While we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith” (Galatians 6:10, NAS).

<sup>5</sup> As Ephesians 1 teaches, we have been chosen, adopted, and loved by God.

<sup>6</sup> See Revelation 19:7-8.

<sup>7</sup> See Ephesians 2:20 and 1 Peter 2:6.

<sup>8</sup> See Hebrews 3:6.

<sup>9</sup> John 13:34.

<sup>10</sup> Galatians 5:13.

<sup>11</sup> Ephesians 4:2.

<sup>12</sup> Ephesians 4:32.

<sup>13</sup> 1 Thessalonians 4:18.

<sup>14</sup> James 5:16.

<sup>15</sup> We also need the spiritual oversight of godly leaders. In Acts 20:28, Paul charged the elders, “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.” Hebrews 13:17 says of elders, “For they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account.” And of course, as Jesus taught in Matthew 18 and as Paul taught in 1 Corinthians 5, church discipline can only happen in the church body.

<sup>16</sup> See Matthew 4:19, Acts 1:8, 2 Timothy 4:5, 2 Corinthians 5:20.

<sup>17</sup> See Matthew 4:19, Acts 1:8, 2 Timothy 4:5, 2 Corinthians 5:20.